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NEWS RELEASE

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UM COACHING 'WIZ' A REAL ROCKET SCIENTIST

MISSOULA —

The tight end coach for The University of Montana Grizzlies football team is nicknamed "The Wiz," but not just because he's an actual rocket scientist.

Ron Wisniewski said people have trouble pronouncing his last name, so Wiz is often just easier for them. But he also has more education than your average football coach. A lot more.

"I have a bachelor's degree in astrophysics, so technically I am a rocket scientist," Wisniewski said. "I like space and all that stuff. I also have a master's degree in aerospace engineering and a Ph.D. in mathematics and mathematics education."

The 35-year-old wears two hats at UM – that of assistant football coach and adjunct professor of mathematics. So when he isn't teaching players blocking techniques and passing routes, he's introducing students to subjects like calculus and mathematics for elementary educators.

Wisniewski admits it's a bit unusual for a coach to have his academic credentials.

"I've met a few other college coaches who have Ph.D.s, but they usually have degrees

-more-

in something like psychology or sports physiology,” he said. “For me, math and physics just came easier. But I want to say right off that I’m not an overly bright guy. I’m just Joe Average, but I’m disciplined in my work.”

Wisniewski said being an academician doesn’t help him much in the football world – in terms of physics and math – except for the teaching skills it helped him acquire.

“When you’re coaching, you are still teaching,” he said. “I’ve been teaching for about 10 years or so, and whether it’s physics or football, these teaching skills have been important everywhere I’ve been.”

His Wiz skills mean Griz players don’t have to look far for a math tutor.

“A lot of the guys come to me for help,” he said. “I like the tutoring because I get to know the guys in a more complete, well-rounded way.”

Wisniewski said that while many Griz players seem to respect his educational background, “the bottom line is that they have to respect you for what you are teaching and the football techniques you know.”

A native of East Brunswick, N.J., Wisniewski earned his undergraduate degree at Rutgers University. He played wide receiver and tight end positions in high school and college. At Rutgers he played in a 185-pound-and-under league before an injury prompted him to focus on coaching.

The Wiz went west to earn his master’s degree at the University of Colorado in Boulder. He then returned to New Jersey to hone his coaching skills, working two years of high school ball and five years at Pennsylvania’s NCAA Division II East Stroudsburg University and New Jersey’s NCAA Division III Kean University. He was offensive

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coordinator at Kean.

Then he headed back west to the University of Northern Colorado, where he earned his doctorate. It was at NCAA Division II UNC that Wisniewski joined Joe Glenn's coaching team six years ago. When Glenn was hired as UM head coach last December, the Wiz came along to round out the new Griz coaching team.

Wisniewski believes that society often makes people choose between coaching and academics.

"I think one of the reasons I get to do this is that I'm single," he said. "If I were married, for financial reasons I probably would have focused more on my engineering training."

As it is, the Wiz is a rare breed: a 5-foot-9 rocket scientist who works well among the hulking tight ends and linemen who play football at the college level.

"It's been a wild ride," he said.

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CBS

Local, dailies, People Magazine (photo available upon request)

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